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THE TALES OF
BEEEDLE THE BARD



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BLOOMSBURY

BABBITY RABBITY AND HER CACKLING STUMP

A LONG TIME AGO, in a far-off land, there lived a foolish king who decided that he alone should have the power of magic.

He therefore commanded the head of his army to form a Brigade of Witch-Hunters, and issued them with a pack of ferocious black hounds. At the same time, the King caused proclamations to be read in every village and town across the land: 'Wanted by the King, an Instructor in Magic.'

No true witch or wizard dared volunteer for the post, for they were all in hiding from the Brigade of Witch-Hunters.

However, a cunning charlatan with no magical power saw a chance of enriching himself, and arrived at the palace, claiming to be a wizard of enormous skill. The charlatan performed a few simple tricks, which convinced the foolish King of his magical powers, and was immediately



appointed Grand Sorcerer in Chief, the King's Private Magic Master.

The charlatan bade the King give him a large sack of gold, so that he might purchase wands and other magical necessities. He also requested several large rubies, to be used in the casting of curative charms, and a silver chalice or two, for the storing and maturing of potions. All these things the foolish King supplied.

The charlatan stowed the treasure safely in his own house and returned to the palace grounds.

He did not know that he was being watched by an old woman who lived in a hovel on the edge of the grounds. Her name was Babbitty, and she was the washerwoman who kept the palace linens soft, fragrant and white. Peeping from behind her drying sheets, Babbitty saw the charlatan snap two twigs from one of the King's trees and disappear into the palace.

The charlatan gave one of the twigs to the King and assured him that it was a wand of tremendous power.

'It will only work, however,' said the charlatan, 'when you are worthy of it.'

Every morning the charlatan and the foolish King walked out into the palace grounds, where they waved their wands and shouted nonsense at the sky. The charlatan was careful to perform more tricks,





so that the King remained convinced of his Grand Sorcerer's skill, and of the power of the wands that had cost so much gold.

One morning, as the charlatan and the foolish King were twirling their twigs, and hopping in circles, and chanting meaningless rhymes, a loud cackling reached the King's ears. Babbitty the washerwoman was watching the King and the charlatan from the window of her tiny cottage, and was laughing so hard she soon sank out of sight, too weak to stand.

'I must look most undignified, to make the old washerwoman laugh so!' said the King. He ceased his hopping and twig twirling, and frowned. 'I grow weary of practice! When shall I be ready to perform real spells in front of my subjects, Sorcerer?'

The charlatan tried to soothe his pupil, assuring him that he would soon be

capable of astonishing feats of magic, but Babbitty's cackling had stung the foolish King more than the charlatan knew.

'Tomorrow,' said the King, 'we shall invite our court to watch their King perform magic!'

The charlatan saw that the time had come to take his treasure and flee.

'Alas, Your Majesty, it is impossible! I had forgotten to tell Your Majesty that I must set out on a long journey tomorrow -'

'If you leave this palace without my permission, Sorcerer, my Brigade of Witch-Hunters will hunt you down with their hounds! Tomorrow morning you will assist me to perform magic for the benefit of my lords and ladies, and if anybody laughs at me, I shall have you beheaded!'

The King stormed back to the palace, leaving the charlatan alone and afraid. Not all his cunning could save him now, for he





could not run away, nor could he help the King with magic that neither of them knew.

Seeking a vent for his fear and his anger, the charlatan approached the window of Babbitty the washerwoman. Peering inside, he saw the little old lady sitting at her table, polishing a wand. In a corner behind her, the King's sheets were washing themselves in a wooden tub.

The charlatan understood at once that Babbitty was a true witch, and that she who had given him his awful problem could also solve it.

'Crone!' roared the charlatan. 'Your cackling has cost me dear! If you fail to help me, I shall denounce you as a witch, and it will be you who is torn apart by the King's hounds!'

Old Babbitty smiled at the charlatan and assured him that she would do everything in her power to help.

The charlatan instructed her to conceal herself inside a bush while the King gave his magical display, and to perform the King's spells for him, without his knowledge. Babbitty agreed to the plan but asked one question.

'What, sir, if the King attempts a spell Babbitty cannot perform?'

The charlatan scoffed.

'Your magic is more than equal to that fool's imagination,' he assured her, and he retired to the castle, well pleased with his own cleverness.



The following morning all the lords and ladies of the kingdom assembled in the palace grounds. The King climbed on to a stage in front of them, with the charlatan by his side.

‘I shall firstly make this lady’s hat disappear!’ cried the King, pointing his twig at a noblewoman.

From inside a bush nearby, Babbitty pointed her wand at the hat and caused it to vanish. Great was the astonishment and admiration of the crowd, and loud their applause for the jubilant King.

‘Next, I shall make that horse fly!’ cried the King, pointing his twig at his own steed.

From inside the bush, Babbitty pointed her wand at the horse and it rose high into the air.

The crowd was still more thrilled and amazed, and they roared their appreciation of their magical King.

‘And now,’ said the King, looking all

around for an idea; and the Captain of his Brigade of Witch-Hunters ran forwards.

'Your Majesty,' said the Captain, 'this very morning, Sabre died of eating a poisonous toadstool! Bring him back to life, Your Majesty, with your wand!'

And the Captain heaved on to the stage the lifeless body of the largest of the witch-hunting hounds.

The foolish King brandished his twig and pointed it at the dead dog. But inside the bush, Babbitty smiled, and did not trouble to lift her wand, for no magic can raise the dead.

When the dog did not stir, the crowd began first to whisper, and then to laugh. They suspected that the King's first two feats had been mere tricks after all.

'Why doesn't it work?' the King screamed at the charlatan, who bethought himself of the only ruse left to him.





'There, Your Majesty, there!' he shouted, pointing at the bush where Babbitty sat concealed. 'I see her plain, a wicked witch who is blocking your magic with her own evil spells! Seize her, somebody, seize her!'

Babbitty fled from the bush, and the Brigade of Witch-Hunters set off in pursuit, unleashing their hounds, who bayed for Babbitty's blood. But as she reached a low hedge, the little witch vanished from sight, and when the King, the charlatan and all the courtiers gained the other side, they found the pack of witch-hunting hounds barking and scrabbling around a bent and aged tree.

'She has turned herself into a tree!' screamed the charlatan and, dreading lest Babbitty turn back into a woman and denounce him, he added, 'Cut her down, Your Majesty, that is the way to treat evil witches!'

An axe was brought at once, and the old tree was felled to loud cheers from the courtiers and the charlatan.

However, as they were making ready to return to the palace, the sound of loud cackling stopped them in their tracks.

'Fools!' cried Babbitty's voice from the stump they had left behind. 'No witch or wizard can be killed by being cut in half! Take the axe, if you do not believe me, and cut the Grand Sorcerer in two!'

The Captain of the Brigade of Witch-Hunters was eager to make the experiment, but as he raised the axe the charlatan fell to his knees,

screaming for mercy and confessing all his wickedness. As he was dragged away to the dungeons, the tree stump cackled more loudly than ever.

'By cutting a witch in half, you have unleashed a dreadful curse upon your kingdom!' it told the petrified King. 'Henceforth, every stroke of harm that you inflict upon my fellow witches and wizards will feel like an axe stroke in your own side, until you will wish you could die of it!'

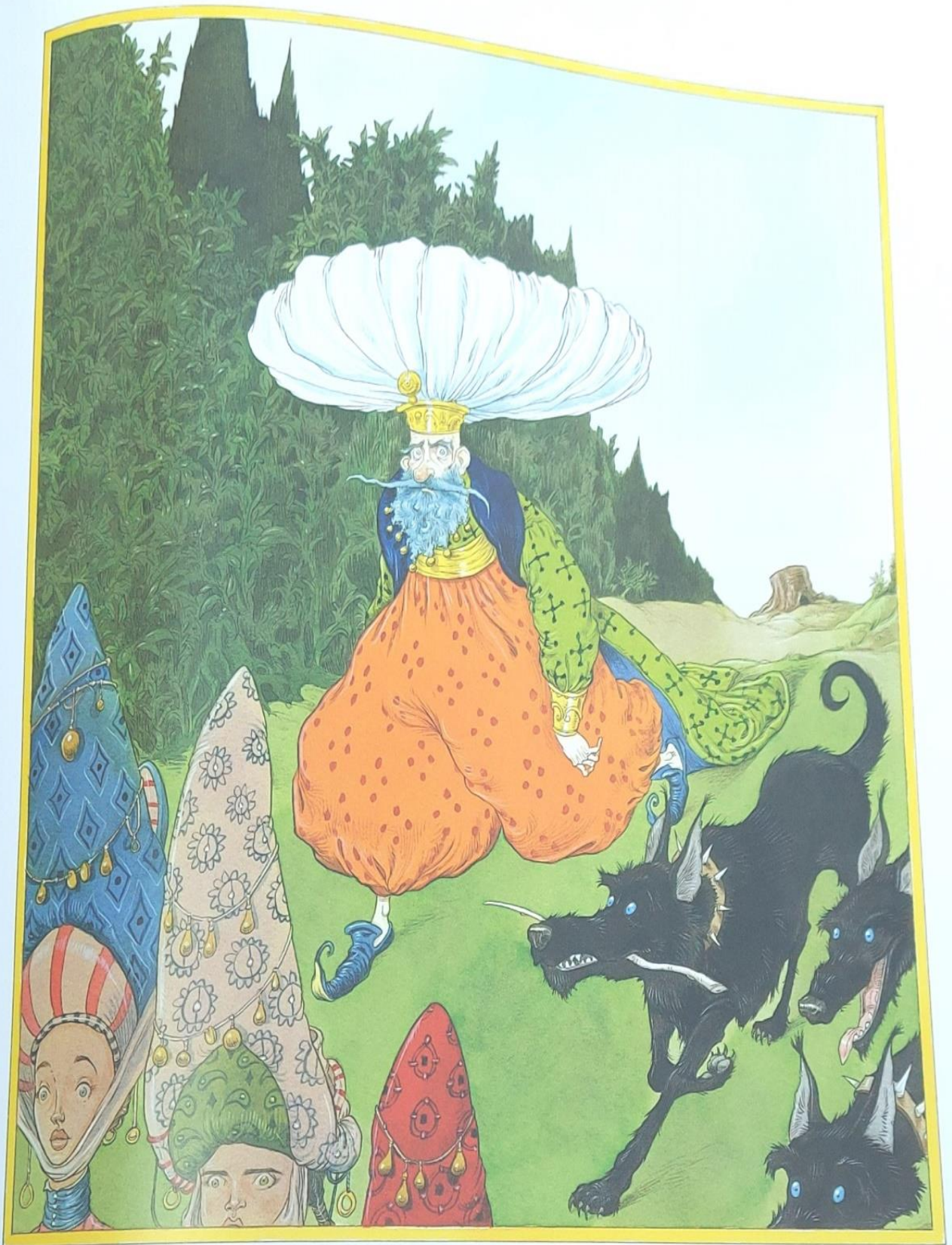
At that, the King fell to his knees too, and told the stump that he would issue a proclamation at once, protecting all the witches and wizards of the kingdom, and allowing them to practise their magic in peace.

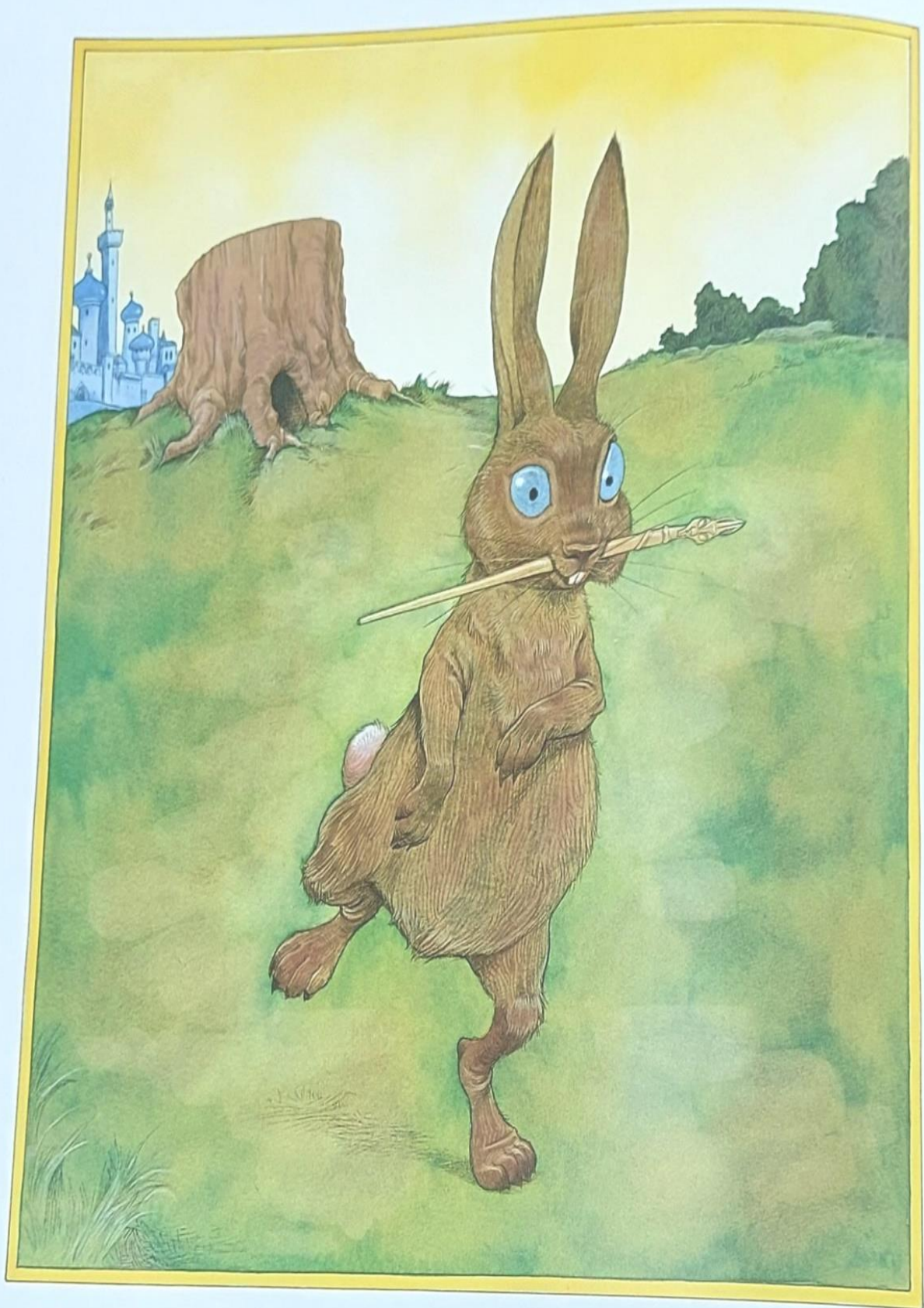
'Very good,' said the stump, 'but you have not yet made amends to Babbitty!'

'Anything, anything at all!' cried the foolish King, wringing his hands before the stump.

'You will erect a statue of Babbitty upon me, in memory of your poor washerwoman, and to remind you for ever of your own foolishness!' said the stump.

The King agreed to it at once, and promised to engage the foremost sculptor in the land, and have the statue made of pure gold. Then the shamed King and all the noblemen and women returned to the palace, leaving the tree stump cackling behind them.





When the grounds were deserted once more, there wriggled from a hole between the roots of the tree stump a stout and whiskery old rabbit with a wand clamped between her teeth. Babbitty hopped out of the grounds and far away, and ever after a golden statue of the washerwoman stood upon the tree stump, and no witch or wizard was ever persecuted in the kingdom again.

